

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

February 16, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

As you know, the *Salt Lake Tribune* recently reported¹ that Utah State Rep. Mike Noel (R), a leading proponent of President Trump's illegal shrinking of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and Bears Ears National Monument, has failed to disclose his ownership of a company – valued at more than \$1.2 million² – with land holdings inside Grand Staircase-Escalante's original boundaries. The Interior Department's failure to conduct any due diligence on Rep. Noel's financial stake in the outcome of President Trump's decision raises several urgent and troubling questions.

As the *Tribune* noted:

Noel advocated for shrinking [Grand Staircase-Escalante], and even sponsored a resolution in 2017 calling on Utah's congressional delegation to support shrinking the monument, which the president did in December after months of speculation.

Meanwhile, he had hundreds of acres of farmland near the monument and the parcel within, all owned by a company he didn't list by its registered name on conflict of interest forms.

As for the 40 acres now outside the monument boundary, the *Tribune* reports, "Noel concedes the 40 acres in question was 'most likely' outside the monument after the recent boundary change."

You recently told the U.S. Senate that you want the Interior Department, during your tenure, to be the most transparent of any in your lifetime.³ In that spirit of transparency, I request clarification on the following points.

¹ "Rep. Mike Noel's company owned land inside Grand Staircase-Escalante while he fought against the monument." *Salt Lake Tribune*. Feb. 14, 2018. <https://www.sltrib.com/news/politics/2018/02/14/it-looks-as-if-rep-mike-noels-company-owned-land-inside-grand-staircase-escalante-while-he-fought-against-the-monument/>

² "Report: Utah Rep. Noel to benefit personally and professionally from new reduced Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument boundary." Western Values Project. <https://westernvaluesproject.org/report-utah-rep-noel-to-benefit-personally-and-professionally-from-new-reduced-grand-staircase-escalante-national-monument-boundary/>


³ A video recording of your statement is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDHYAUEb1zA>

- 1) Were you aware of Rep. Noel's ownership of these properties prior to the publication of the Feb. 14 *Salt Lake Tribune* article?
- 2) Did Mr. Noel ever reveal or suggest his ownership interests to you or your staff?
- 3) In your meetings or communications with Rep. Noel prior to redrawing the boundaries of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, did you or your staff ask Mr. Noel whether he owned property impacted by the boundary change?
- 4) Prior to the boundary reduction, did you or your staff ask Mr. Noel whether he faced any potential conflicts of interest in the outcome?
- 5) Are you aware of any other elected official in Utah with a financial interest in the boundary change?
- 6) How will the Department of the Interior ensure that future administration policies are not tainted by similar financial conflicts of interest?

Transparency in this matter is more than a question of words. It requires action. Rep. Noel's failure of transparency and the Interior Department's apparent failure to learn of his financial stake in a major policy decision have national consequences. This episode needs to be remedied and cannot be repeated.

I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



Raul M. Grijalva
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources